DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 835 SO 022 020

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TITLE African Roots of Cultural Diversity in American Society: Rationale for a Critical Analysis and Reform in American Higher Education.

PUB DATE Jul 91

NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Council on Black Americna Affairs Forum at the Leadership 2000 League for Innovation Conference (Chicago, IL, July 7-10, 1991).

PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Black Influences; *Blacks; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Evaluation; *Curriculum Research; Educational Philosophy; Higher Education; *Minority Groups; Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

The view that people of black African descent have made few significant contributions to the history of mankind is a widely held concept in the social science and humanities curricula of U.S. secondary and higher education. Prior to celebrating the cultural diversity of the United States, the curriculum and materials should be analyzed and reformed. Recognition of minority contributions often are presented in isolation during special events of ethnic heritage, and this exclusion may be the cause of widespread racial unrest on campuses across the United States. A summary overview of the historical literature with respect to the planned and purposeful exclusion of people of black African descent as contributors to the diversity of classical Western culture is provided, and the issues surrounding this exclusion are examined. The impact of this exclusion on the psychological and cognitive development of children of black African descent within the U.S. education system also is discussed. Recommendations to correct this dilemma are offered: (1) each child's cultural heritage should be represented in the curriculum, because such inclusions serve as credible references and stimuli for learning; and (2) the Council on Black American Affairs should take the lead and assemble other education groups to initiate a reform movement to review social science and humanities curricula and recommend necessary changes required to reflect the presence and significant contributions of people of black African descent and other minority groups. (KM)

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AFRICAN ROOTS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN SOCIETY: Rationale for a Critical Analysis and Reform in American Higher Education

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SO 022 020

JULY 1991

Paper presented as a part of the Council on Black American Affairs forum at the Leadership 2000 League for Innovation Conference, held in Chicago, Illinois, on July 7 - 10, 1991.

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by Dr. Roy G. Phillips

INTRODUCTION

A review of textbooks on the history of mankind as presented by some American and European scholars, shows the lack of presence and significant contributions of people of Black African descent. This view is highly evident in the work of an eminent historian of European descent, (Arnold J. Toynbee, 1946) (A Study of History) who is quoted by Jackson, 1990) as saying:

> **"The Black race has not helped to create any civilizations, while the Polynesian White race has helped to create one civilization; the Brown race, two; the Yellow race, three; the Red race and the Nordic White race, four a piece; the Alpine White race; nine and the Mediterranean White race, ten"**

This view is widely held and propagated by other eminent scholars of European descent. It is unfortunate that this view has become ingrained within the social sciences and humanities curricula of American secondary and higher education. This view is referred to by some historians (Bernal, 1987) as the Aryan Model of ancient history, which is cited as having its origin during the period of European development and expansion of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. This view has shaped the writing of ancient and modern history. Contrary to this view, a body of scholarly research and knowledge exists, documenting the presence of significant contributions by people of Black African descent to the cultural diversity of classical Western civilization. (Clarke, 1979) and other Nile Valley scholars take issue with the Aryan view of ancient history.

He asserts:

> "Most Western historians have not been willing to admit that there is an African history to be written about, and that this history predates the emergence of Europe by thousands of years."

He further explains:

> "When the Europeans emerged and began to extend themselves into the broader world of Africa and Asia during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they went on to colonize most of humanity. Later they would colonize world scholarship, mainly the writing of history. History was then written or rewritten to show or imply that Europeans were the only creators of what he called civilization."

Thus, a Eurocentric domination of scholarship has permitted little or no critical review or dialogue of any significant research or knowledge outside of the status quo. In fact, any documented scholarly attempts to correct the records are viewed as cranky and unacceptable.

It is this writer's opinion that any attempts to celebrate or pay homage to the cultural diversity within the American higher education community should be placed on hold until an open and critical analysis and subsequent reform in the social sciences and humanities with respect to the presence and significant contributions by people of Black African descent are historically recognized.

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A RATIONALE

Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and other minorities constitute a majority of minorities in most of the urban schools of the nation (Hodgkinson, 1985). Yet, when one reviews the curriculum in these schools, very little or no attention is given to their ancestral contributions to the mainstream of history. Recognition of significant minority contributions is often displayed in isolation during special events of ethnic heritage outside of the mainstream of the American secondary schools and higher education curriculum. It is this writer's view that widespread campus racial unrest on many of our prestigious campuses have their roots in the exclusion of Blacks and other minorities from within the academic fabric of American higher education.
This must be corrected if all students are to be provided with a correct view of the history of mankind.

The psychic and cognitive development of students are highly related to the manner in which they are perceived and treated by critical reference groups including parents, teachers, the news media and the entire body of the school curriculum. All students should be provided positive learning experiences regarding their ancestral history, as well as that of other groups, in order to understand and work with others in the improvement of the society. This is especially critical in a multi-racial society that has a history of racial exclusion and hostility toward oppressed and isolated groups. It should be the role and mission of higher education to provide this leadership.

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The purpose of this paper is three-fold: First, to provide a summary overview of the historical literature with respect to the planned and purposeful exclusion of people of Black African descent as contributors to the diversity of classical Western culture, and a critical examination of the issues surrounding this exclusion; Second, to summarize the impact of this exclusion on the psychic and cognitive development of children of Black African descent within the American educational system; and Third, to offer recommendations regarding the need for curriculum reforms in the social sciences and humanities.

A CRITICAL SUMMARY OF THE HISTORICAL ISSUES OF EXCLUSION

A summary review of the historical literature with respect to the presence and significant contributions of people of Black African descent may be examined within the contexts of two opposing views of ancient history (Bernal, 1987). These two views are described by Bernal as the 'Aryan' and Ancient views.

The Aryan view deals with the issue of the origination of Greek civilization. Was its origin autochthonos or highly influenced by African and Asiatic civilizations? The Aryan view perceived Greek civilization as the birth-child of Western civilization and as essentially pure and European in origin with little or no external influences.

The Ancient view is essentially the traditional view as seen through the eyes of major Greek scholars and other ancient historians including Herodotus, the father of history, Diodorus and Strabo. This view holds that Greek civilization was highly influenced by the African

Nile Valley and Levantine civilizations. The major issue surrounding this view deals with a lack of acceptance by proponents of the Aryan model concerning the nature and extent of Afro-Asiatic colonization of Greece during the period of Greek barbarism.

Bernal argues further that the Aryan view is of recent origin and has no basis for acceptance. The substance of his argument is summarized in the following comment:

> "If I am right in urging the overthrow of the Aryan model and its replacement by the Revised Ancient one, it will be necessary not only to re-think the fundamental basis of Western civilization, but also to recognize the penetration of racism and continental chauvinism into all our historiography or philosophy of writing history"

He offers an explanation for the overthrow of the Ancient view by European scholars during the 18th and 19th centuries. He asserts:

> "The ancient model had no major internal deficiencies, or weaknesses in explanatory powers. It was overthrown for external reasons. For 18th and 19th century Romantics and racists, it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe but, also as its pure childhood, to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites. Therefore, the ancient model had to be overthrown and replaced by something more acceptable."

The views of Bernal on this issue are not new. In fact, leading scholars of the Nile Valley Movement including (James, 1954), Stolen Legacy; (Diop, 1974), The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality; (Jackson, 1970), Ages of Gold and Silver; Ivan Van (Sertima, 1976), They Came Before Columbus, preceded the work of Bernal.

They were early proponents of the ancient view, however, they lack the proper academic connections for their scholarly works to be accepted by the academic establishment.

Despite the popularity of the Aryan view by some European and American experts, other eminent scholars of European descent have strongly embraced the Ancient view. These scholars include Rawlinson and Wilkinson, who translated the work of ancient historians such as Herodotos. These scholars confirm the significant contributions of people of Black African descent to the early initiation of civilization in such fields as medicine, astronomy, religion, mathematics, science, art, literature, agriculture, architecture and engineering. Many current historical texts attribute these contributions only to people of Indo-European descent.

Diop identifies several major issues with respect to the manner in which some eminent European and American scholars have dismissed a recognition of the contributions of people of Black African descent. The first is the removal of Egypt and the Nile Valley civilizations out of Africa into the Middle East. Second, a denial of the racial identity of the ancient Black African people of the Nile and Mesopotamian Valleys. Many of the Black African ethnic groups such as the ancient

Egyptians, Cushites of Mesopotamia and ancient Phoenicians have been classified as White. However, it should be pointed out that archaeological as well as anthropological evidences show that the preponderance of racial mixing along the Nile, and within Palestine and Arabia, did not occur until the ancient Black African civilizations were well advanced in their development. It should be noted that the first Indo-European invaders did not enter the Nile Valley until the 16th century B.C., when these African civilizations had reached their zenith.

This does not imply that there was no racial mixing during the early dynastic periods, since Blacks dominated the early Mediterrean civilizations, it is fair to assume that they carried out miscegenation at a comparable level to that carried out by present Europeans.

The third issue deals with the origin of Nile Valley civilizations.

Again, archaeological and anthropological evidence show that the civilizations of the Nile Valley originated from the Sudan, Ethiopia and the interior of the African continent, where there is evidence of the presence of other civilizations that have not been recognized by eminent European scholars.

The fourth issue deals with the origin of Greek civilization. Testimony and writings of early Greek scholars place Africans and Phoenicians in Greece during the 21st century B.C. and again, during the 18th dynasty, when Black Africans expelled the hated Hyksos, a Semite group from their homeland.

Other evidences of African presence and contributions to the beginning of Greek civilization include: the presence of African legends in Greek history, the naming of African cities and geographic landscapes in Greece, the heavy borrowing from African religion by the Greeks, and the placement of Greek scholars under the tutelage of African priests,and the presence of African words and dialects in the early Greek language.

In summary, Bernal describes four major forces as factors contributing to the overthrow of the ancient view of history. The first, he attributes to the rise of Christianity. Despite Christianity's African and Near Eastern roots, the early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Tatian and later Protestant reformers identified the Teutonic languages more with Greek than with the Latin language of the Catholic Church. They were furthermore alienated by Neo-Platonism, Hermeticism and Gnosticism as products of African and Near Eastern religions. A strong alliance, therefore, developed between Greece and Christianity. In fact, Greek became the translated language of the Christian Bible. The images of the new religion were transformed from the Black African Gods and Godesses to those of European images.

Second, the rise of the concept of progress. The new paradigm of progress that emerged in Europe during the period of rebirth viewed Egypt, and the Middle East as backward, static and lacking in the dynamic progress of the new age. Greece was viewed as the new birth child of this movement, even through her cultural roots were deeply imbedded in the ancient civilizations of the Nile Valley and Near East.

Third and perhaps the most damaging force was the rise of racism that closely paralleled the rise of universities in Norwestern Europe including Germany, England and France. Muller, Gobineau and Blumenbach laid the scientific foundation for a new classification of mankind into races.

The notion that fair-skinned people of Europe were viewed as superior in intellect, moral character and temperament to the darker skinned people of the Southern cradle, became acceptable. This negative concept spread with the expansion of European people into Africa and Asia. It provided the rationale and emotional bases for slavery and colonialism of people of color. By its very nature, it became interwoven within the major institutions of European societies including the church, politics, education and the economic spheres. Early American fathers introduced the concept into the legal and social fabric of American Society and it became the natural order of things.

Romanticism was a forth factor. As the new European national states emerged, scholars placed a new importance on geography, national characteristics and categorical differences between people who viewed dynamism as the highest value. There developed the feeling that people who live and develop in cold Northern climates are more vital and intelligent than those who develop in the Southern cradle.

The culminating impact of these forces created a new world view of people.Their past and future were based on an hierarchical racial species paradigm in which people of European descent were viewed as

endowed by the creator to rule and conquer. The impact of this view has broad implications for the development of people of color within an Eurocentric educational environment.

The Impact of Exclusion and Negative References And Group Expectancies Upon Learning

The curriculum is to a learner as gasoline is to a combustible engine. It provides a stimulus to learning. It includes all of the organized and unorganized experiences of the school environment which extends into the larger community setting, including the media and attitudes of people who plan and direct learning.

The learning process is a personal undertaking that requires time, discipline, and intense effort. The process is highly influenced by teachers, parents, the entire curriculum of the school as well as other groups and institutions within the student's learning environment.

These represent credible references. The messages from these references are powerful in that it communicates expressions of belief -- verbal or nonverbal about the level of performance that is expected.

The educational development of Blacks in America has occurred within a society that has been particularly hostile to their development.

The widespread expectation of Black intellectual inferiority and poor performance --- communicated constantly through the projections of stereotyped images, curriculum exclusion from the mainstream of academics, verbal and nonverbal exchanges in daily interaction, and

the incessant debate about genetics and intelligence, poor school performance as measured by standardized test scores -- represents a negative credible reference group expectancy (Howard and Hammond - 1985).

Their expectancies raise fear and self-doubt in the minds of many Blacks, especially when they are young and hail from deprived and oppressed family backgrounds where energy for survival is greater than the support for education. This has caused many talented Black students to avoid intellectual competitive activities, resulting in chronic under-performance.

Further research in social psychology reveals that expectancies affect behavior in two ways. They affect performance behavior, the capacity to marshal the sharpness and intensity required for competitive success; and second, they influence cognition, the mental processes by which people rationalize the occurrences of everyday life.

Credible expectancies, thus, affect the intensity of effort, the level of concentration of distractibility, and the willingness to take reasonable risks --- a key factor in the development of self-confidence and new skills.

Credible expectancies also influence the way people think about or explain their performance outcomes.

Psychological studies demonstrate that the cause to which people attribute their successes and failures have an important impact on subsequent performance.

The learning process is a succession of successes and failures. Those who attribute their failures to inadequate effort are more than likely to conclude that more effort will produce a better outcome.

This represents a healthy attitude toward failure. In contrast, those who have been led to expect failure will attribute their failures to lack of ability. This internalization of failure makes it difficult for one to rationalize the investment of greater effort to achieve desirable results. Howard and Hammond describe:

> "This combined effect on behavior and cognition is what makes expectancy so powerful. The negative expectancy first tends to generate failure through its impact on behavior and then influences the individual to blame the failure on lack of ability, rather than the actual and correctable problem of inadequate effort.

They explain:

> "This mis-attribution, in turn, becomes the basis for a negative expectancy. By this process, the individual, in effect , internalizes the low estimation originally held by others. This internalized negative expectancy powerfully affects future competitive behavior and future results.

This phenomenon, is unique to Black people since they are singled out and stigmatized for presumed genetic intellectual inferiority, based upon their biology and exclusion from the mainstream of history. Thus, each engagement in intellectual competition carries the weight of one's own genetic endowment and self-worth. Facing such a terrible prospect, many Black people recoil from any situation where the powerful rumor of inferiority might be proved true.

On the other hand, positive expectancies can generate self-confidence and result in successes. This is the reason the curriculum in both secondary and higher education is so powerful. Its message can serve as a powerful tool for the building of self-confidence and self-worth, which provide the foundation for intrinsic motivation and performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The curriculum of an educational institution represents the very embodiment of the cultural achievements of mankind and as such, each child's cultural heritage should be correctly represented in it.

Moreover, such an inclusion also serves as a credible reference and a stimulus for learning. This paper has demonstrated that there is a need for educators to take the lead in critically examining the social sciences and humanities curricula of higher education and based, upon this review, carry out the necessary reforms to correctly represent the significant contributions of each major racial group that is represented within the school community.

It is my recommendation that the Council on Black American Affairs, an affiliate of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, take the lead and assembly other educational groups to initiate a curriculum reform movement to review the social science and humanities curricula of the community college system and recommend necessary reforms that are required to reflect the presence and significant contributions by people of Black African descent and other minority groups.

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